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Northampton Renews Partnership with ServiceNet to Open Emergency Shelter at First Churches of Northampton; State Commits to Locating an Isolation & Quarantine Shelter in Western Mass

NORTHAMPTON - Today, Mayor David J. Narkewicz announced that the City of Northampton, in partnership with ServiceNet, will open an emergency 24/7 shelter at First Churches of Northampton, 129 Main Street, by December 4, to expand the city's total capacity to 40 beds for those needing shelter.

ServiceNet, in recognition of the ongoing threat of the virus, has kept the doors of its Grove Street and Center Street shelters open in order to keep the residents of its overnight shelters safe since the onset of COVID-19. With the onset of winter, current sleeping spaces within those two facilities are inadequate to allow for proper social distancing. The Northampton COVID-19 Emergency Management Team - led by Mayor Narkewicz and composed of Public Health, Fire Rescue, Emergency Management, Police, Central Services, and other city departments - has spent the last several months searching for a location and planning to expand the capacity for sheltering, securing physical and financial resources, and working with ServiceNet officials on operational details. ServiceNet's effort is being supported by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development.

"The City of Northampton is eternally grateful to the congregation of First Churches for stepping forward to provide a space to shelter people in need in our city for the colder months," said Mayor David Narkewicz, "also, we thank our trusted partner, ServiceNet, for expanding their services to help ensure that we keep this population safe and prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our community. Now that we have a location there's still a lot to do to open the doors by next week, but the city is proud to partner with both organizations to meet this need."

The emergency shelter at First Churches will be staffed 24/7 by ServiceNet staff and supported by city staff and community volunteers. Shelter residents, staff, and volunteers will be tested for COVID-19 prior to entering the facility. Upon entry of the shelter, staff and shelter residents will be screened by a predetermined set of health questions, and if any markers for illness are present, they will not be

allowed into the shelter and will be directed for medical evaluation and isolation at an alternative location. Once inside, residents will be screened twice a day.

“First Churches is proud to partner with ServiceNet and the City of Northampton to meet this important need. Our congregation is committed to providing shelter and safety for people currently without homes,” shared Reverend Todd Weir of First Churches. “In this holiday season, I find hope in our community’s ability to work together to alleviate the serious impacts of COVID.

ServiceNet is urgently in need of staff to support the emergency shelter and is hiring. If you or anyone you know is interested in this critical work, please visit www.servicenet.org/jobs Additionally the City of Northampton continues to seek community volunteers who are able to assist in this effort to safely shelter our most vulnerable neighbors and urges people sign up at www.northamptonma.gov/volunteersubmission or to contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Loren Davine at lorendavine@gmail.com.

“ServiceNet operates two shelters in Northampton – Grove Street Inn, which is open year-round, and the Interfaith Shelter, which is normally open only during the winter months,” added Jay Sacchetti of ServiceNet, “Thanks to funding from DHCD, support from the City of Northampton, and the partnership with First Churches, ServiceNet will now be able to expand services and meet the need for additional shelter beds this winter. This is a vital community effort that has a huge impact on our neighbors who are homeless.”

Additionally, in an effort led by Mayor Narkewicz, a group of western Massachusetts Mayors, Town Managers, and social services agencies secured a commitment from Massachusetts Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders and Samantha Phillips, the Commonwealth’s MEMA Director, to locate an Isolation and Quarantine shelter in western Massachusetts. The effort to secure this critical local site in the region was facilitated by Pamela Schwartz of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness.

“We know so much more about how the virus is transmitted now than we did last spring, and I look forward to working with ServiceNet to ensure the safest possible environment for the shelter residents, First Churches, and our community. The fact that there will be a nearby isolation and quarantine shelter for those who need it will help tremendously in giving confidence to our shelter residents to participate in our testing program knowing there is an alternative site for them locally should they test positive,” shared Northampton Health Director Merridith O’Leary.

For more information, contact the Mayor’s Office at 413-587-1249 or mayor@northamptonma.gov.